



Have you ever  
had to fake confidence  
in an area of expertise  
or a situation?  
Like that first day at a new school  
when you walked in the lunchroom  
and had to pick a seat?  
Maybe it was 9<sup>th</sup> grade  
basketball tryouts.

Or what about  
the fake confidence you needed  
that time you had  
the follow appointment  
with the doctor  
to go over the biopsy results?

The fake confidence you mustered up  
when you left your child  
at their first full week  
of sleep away camp?

Or the latest financial review  
where you just couldn't read  
which way the board  
would decide to cut jobs?

What about the fake confidence  
so many of us draw from  
when you find yourself  
face to face with death?

Standing in the receiving line  
in front the husband  
who has just lost his wife  
to breast cancer?

The news of a family friend's  
son who overdosed?

Those are usually the times  
when we have to fake  
that we have all the confidence  
we lack

but want.

And there are times  
that with practice,  
confidence comes.  
You can practice in your driveway  
enough weeknights to land those lay-ups  
so that in basketball tryouts,  
you might be *nervous*  
but because of practice and now skill  
you can be *confident*.

But in reality nervousness can often  
chip away at that confidence  
so that you still question,  
you wonder what you'll do,  
how you'll react,  
what you should say.

You'll stand in line at a funeral  
to greet the deceased's children,  
and you're confident  
that you don't have to say anything special,  
but at the moment when it is your turn,  
it is like all the confidence  
drains out of you like the bathwater.

I'll confess there are times  
that I fake the confidence I wish I had.  
I may have some skill and practice  
for preaching each week,  
but sometimes I fake the confidence I have  
that what I'll say  
will actually be meaningful.

More than anything  
I think tragedy and death  
bring up fake confidence in us.  
We don't want to say or do,  
***the wrong thing.***  
We don't know how to react  
when we see the open casket  
of our college roommate's young daughter  
or what we'll say at Thanksgiving  
when we learn that our favorite cousin  
has been diagnosed with MS.  
But as Christians,  
our fake confidence

is actually a misnomer.  
Because with enough practice  
and little hopeful assurance,  
our bits and pieces of scripture;  
bits and pieces of lived experience;  
either ours or the experience  
of those we trust;  
in those little glimpses of resurrection,  
of what death and tragedy  
ultimately result in;  
these tell us our confidence  
doesn't have to be fake.

In order to talk more about this fake confidence  
let me take you back a week.  
Last Sunday afternoon,  
before I learned about Texas,  
I was in bed on my phone  
looking at Facebook.  
I know it is a bad habit.  
But you know what,  
I have no other bad habits  
and I can say that in full confidence  
because my wonderful husband  
is out of town for the weekend,  
so there's no one here to contradict me.

So as I scrolled through my newsfeed,  
I saw a video posted  
where one of the comments  
said that a particular video  
was a great story  
as an All Saint follow up.

So I watched it,  
and I loved it and  
I think you will too.



The video features Kate Braestrup,  
who is a chaplain

for the Maine warden service.

She mostly helps to train game warden's  
who end up responding to all sorts  
of outdoor calamities:  
snowmobile accidents,  
drownings and the occasional  
(as she describes it) al fresco homicide.

When the outcome will likely be fatal,  
warden services asks their chaplain  
to come along.

Braesturp guides the wardens  
and emergency crews  
on how to support bereaved people.  
9 times out of 10  
if someone asks to see the body  
of their loved one,  
the best thing to do  
is to let them see the body, she explains.

Letting mourners face death is important.  
But often that kind of request,  
makes us uneasy  
and often we are faking confidence  
because we do not know  
how to grieve and deal with grief.

She tells the story  
of her first husband's death  
and her request to see his body.  
He was a state trooper  
who was killed in the line of duty.  
She says that when she got to the funeral parlor  
she had to fake absolute confidence  
that she really was  
up to seeing her husband,  
because she had never done  
this kind of thing before.

But she did it.  
And she was glad that she did.

Mourners, she says, are beautiful,  
the way a mother will push the hair  
out of her drowned son's eyes;  
the way a husband will put a flower  
on the chest of his spouse.

The video is actually Chaplain Braesturp

telling the story of Nina,  
a 5 year who is insisting  
that she wants to see Andy,  
her best friend and 4 year old cousin.

Andy is dead, though she says,  
that isn't what is unusual;  
what's unusual  
is that 5 year old wants to see him.  
Andy didn't suffer, thankfully  
he died instantly when a neighbor's ATV  
turned over on him.  
But Nina is insistent;  
Nina's mother isn't confident  
that Nina can handle seeing  
Andy's body.

So Nina's mother turns to Chaplain Braestrup: *(start at 8 mins.)*  
<https://www.facebook.com/TheSceneVideo/videos/1570166853050662/>

<https://themoth.org/radio-hour/facing-the-dark>

"You can trust a human being with grief.  
I tell the wardens  
you walk fearlessly  
into the house of mourning  
—because grief is just love  
squaring up to its oldest enemy.  
And after all these mortal human years,  
love is up to the challenge."<sup>1</sup>

Isn't that beautiful?



I love how at the end,  
Kate Braestrup tells us  
that she doesn't have  
to fake confidence anymore  
because she has Nina

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

and now we do too.

This is what Paul is trying to tell  
the Christians in 1 Thessalonians.

*'... do not mourn or grieve  
as those who have no hope,  
for we believe that that  
Jesus died and rose again.'*

I can't help but think about how many of us  
found ourselves stunned and grieving  
a week ago today,  
hearing the news that 27 people  
were killed Sunday morning  
in their church in Texas.

Some of you may have watched  
Carrie Underwood's performance  
on the CMA's Wednesday night  
as she sang a hymn  
for 58 people who were killed  
at a country music concert  
in Las Vegas just last month.

Did you know that now,  
Columbine, the 1999 tragedy  
where two teenagers opened fire  
on their peers and teachers,  
is now NOT in the top 10  
deadliest mass killings in the US history?<sup>2</sup>

This isn't a sermon on gun violence,  
because quite frankly  
they say 2017 is the deadliest year yet  
for mass shootings,  
and that alone makes it  
as plain as the nose on your face  
that something's wrong.

So in the midst of all this swirling violence,  
this death and tragedy  
what can we say?  
What confidence do we have  
as lives are lived and lives are lost?  
Lives given by God,  
mothers, fathers,  
brothers, sisters,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://wtvr.com/2017/11/08/columbine-is-no-longer-one-of-the-10-deadliest-shootings-in-modern-us-history/>

family, friends.

We may feel  
we are faking a lot of confidence  
these days.  
And there are things  
I think we should not say  
in the midst of times like these.



We do not say,  
***that God must have a plan  
or it was God's will.***

We do not say,  
***that the dead are in a better place.***

We do not say,  
***you shouldn't cry,  
their pain/suffering is ended.***

We do not say,  
***that heaven needed more angels.***

We do not say,  
***I know how you must feel,***  
unless we of course we actually know how it feels.

We can say is,  
***this is awful;  
it is the worst  
and we mourn with you  
and we grieve beside you.***

We can say,  
***that grief absolutely  
has no timetable.***

And we can say,  
as Paul does to his church in Thessalonica,  
we can say in confidence  
that we grieve and mourn  
but with hope.

And no, I am not saying  
you need to tell anyone  
who is dealing with grief this.  
But rather this is our posture as Christians  
as we sit and listen and walk along-side  
our brothers and sisters  
in Texas and Las Vegas,  
Virginia Tech, Newtown, and Orlando,  
we claim as Paul does,  
that we do not want  
you to be uninformed brothers and sisters,  
about those who have died  
so that you may not grieve  
as others who have no hope.”  
(1 Thess. 4:13)



Grief void of hope is despair.  
And perhaps the one thing  
where we don't have to fake confidence,  
is that as Christians  
we are not those who despair.  
We are assured that in our grief  
and in our tragedy  
in death and in unspeakable violence,  
we trust in our hearts—  
even if it is way down at the bottom,  
like the basement floor of your heart—  
that there is hope;  
there is always hope,  
because there is always Jesus.

Paul says to his church,  
*comfort each other,*  
*encourage each other*  
*with these words.*

Paul has a hope  
for what death will look like  
—and while it isn't for us  
to say whether he's right  
about being caught up in the clouds or not,

it his a vision of hope.

And his vision of hope,  
ends with being with the Lord forever.  
I'm not sure any of us on this side of the veil  
can say with total assurance  
that we know what will happen in our deaths.  
But based on scripture  
and based on our lived experience  
of God who loves us in Christ,  
we can say some things.

Brain McLaren asks the question,  
“...what might we expect to happen when we die?”  
“nobody knows for sure,  
but in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection,

[McLaren shares his confidence, that]  
we can expect to experience  
death as a passage, like birth,  
the end of one life stage  
and the beginning of another.

However it (death) happens,  
we can expect to discover  
that we’re not falling out of life,  
but deeper into it.

We can expect to feel differently  
about our sufferings.  
We will not see the short-term pain  
that so preoccupied us on the past side of death  
but instead the enduring virtue,  
courage and on the anvil of pain.

We can expect to feel a limitless sense of,  
“Ah yes, now I see.”  
What we longed for,  
reached for,  
touched but couldn’t grasp,  
and knew in part  
will then be so clear.

We can expect to feel  
as if we are waking up  
from being half asleep,  
waking into an explosion of pure, utter gratitude  
as we suddenly and fully realize

all we've had  
and taken for granted all along."<sup>3</sup>



As Paul says,

comfort and encourage  
each other with these words.

In this season of the saints,  
as we look to Advent of our Lord,  
as we live and move in this world  
in these, our given lifetimes,  
we grieve and mourn,  
but we do so with hope.

Hope in Christ.

Even if we have to fake it at first  
—because the more we fake it,  
the less fake it actually is.

“So let us all walk fearlessly  
into the house of mourning.

For grief is just love,  
squaring up to its oldest enemy,  
and after all these mortal human years,  
love is up to the challenge.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation* pgs.251-252. FaithWords. Kindle Edition

<sup>4</sup> <https://themoth.org/radio-hour/facing-the-dark>  
<https://www.facebook.com/TheSceneVideo/videos/1570166853050662/>